



## Senators Seek to Protect U.S. Seaports

*--Bipartisan Bill Would Help Prevent Terrorism in American Harbors--*  
July 14, 2004

**Washington, DC** – In an effort to safeguard America from possible terrorist attacks, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (*D-CA*) joined with Senators Joe Biden (*D-DE*) and Arlen Specter (*R-PA*) today in introducing bipartisan legislation to strengthen American seaports against terrorist attacks and other criminal activity.

**"Millions of shipping containers pass through our ports each month,"** Senator Feinstein said. **"A single container has room for as much as 60,000 pounds of explosives - 10 to 15 times the amount in the Ryder truck used to blow up the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. When you consider that a single ship can carry as many as 8,000 containers at one time, the vulnerability of our seaports is alarming. Strengthening criminal penalties, as we are doing with this legislation, is one way we can make our nation's ports less vulnerable."**

**"Each year, more than 141 million ferry and cruise ship passengers, more than 2 billion tons of domestic and international freight and 3 billion tons of oil move through U.S. seaports. Millions of truck-size cargo containers are offloaded onto U.S. docks,"** said Senator Biden. **"Many seaports are still protected by little more than a chain-link fence and, in far too many instances, have no adequate safeguards to ensure that only authorized personnel can access sensitive areas of the port. If we allow this system to continue unchecked, it's only a matter of time until terrorists attempt to deliver a weapon of mass destruction to our doorstep via ship, truck, or cargo container."**

**"The Seaports Act we're introducing today will fill a gaping hole in our defense against terrorism and make American ports, passengers and cargo safer,"** said Sen. Arlen Specter, a senior member of the Judiciary Committee.

To address the problem, Senators Biden and Specter introduced the Reducing Crime and Terrorism at America's Seaports Act of 2004. The Biden-Specter bill will make it a crime to use a vessel to smuggle terrorists or dangerous materials into the U.S., impose stiff criminal penalties for providing false information to a federal law enforcement officer at a port or on a vessel, and double the sentence of anyone who fraudulently gains access to a seaport. Today's legislation builds on similar legislation introduced by Senators Biden and Specter in each of the last two years.

The bill would also directly address several immediate threats by increasing penalties for smugglers who misrepresent illicit cargo. It would also bridge specific gaps in current federal law by making it a crime for a vessel operator to fail to stop when ordered to do so by a federal law enforcement officer.

**“This bill makes common sense changes to our criminal laws and will help to close security gaps confronting our ports. It incorporates suggestions made by several of my colleagues and I look forward to the Senate taking prompt action on it this year,”** said Biden, the top Democrat on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime.

**“Today’s legislation is the result of years of work by a tenacious, bipartisan team of Senators. I’m pleased to join them in introducing this vital initiative,”** concluded Specter.

There are 361 seaports in the United States that serve essential national interests by facilitating the flow of trade and the movement of cruise passengers, as well as supporting the effective and safe deployment of U.S. Armed Forces. These seaport facilities and other marine areas cover some 3.5 million square miles of ocean area and 95,000 miles of coastline.

###